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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 003010

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: Islamabad VIP Visit Limitation Request

REF: Islamabad 0268

**¶1.** (U) Summary: Embassy Islamabad and its three consulates cannot continue to host visitors at the current level. The security situation is too precarious and we do not have the people to support such a heavy visitor load: manning in some Embassy sections is now down to 50 percent. Moreover, there are repeated demands for meetings with the same high-level Pakistani officials, sometimes three or four a week. We urge a system be put in place so that official travelers must initially contact the desk with travel plans. We request Department support when we refuse country clearance or ask that the size of delegations be reduced. We are about to deny country clearance for some executive branch visitors on orientation or routine consultations. Some delegations can employ technologies such as video conferencing, and we ask that this option be explored for meetings with Pakistani counterparts. End summary.

**¶2.** (U) In February 2009, post issued Reftel providing guidelines for visiting delegations. Post now reiterates these guidelines as follows:

- a. No more than 15 people per delegation.
- b. No overlapping delegations, and at least two days between each delegation.
- c. No RON in Islamabad for delegations visiting Afghanistan or Iraq.
- d. No requests for Saturday or Sunday meetings with the President, Prime Minister, or Chief of Army Staff.
- e. Thirty-days advanced notice is required to allow logistics, security, and country clearance processing. We ask that H reach out to the relevant committees and ask for travel schedules for congressional travel well in advance.

**¶3.** (SBU) The highest priority for Embassy Pakistan is congressional travel. We believe the large number of congressional delegations we have hosted has had a very positive effect on appropriations for Pakistan, for both civilian and military assistance. We are convinced that these visits have enhanced the understanding of the Af/Pak Strategy. Our briefings, particularly on intelligence issues, have been useful in dispelling myths about activities in Pakistan. The CODELs that come to Pakistan are motivated, well-briefed and professional.

**¶4.** (SBU) But we also seek H's help in ensuring that CODELs do not overlap. It would be helpful if congressional delegations could be encouraged to merge. We know how difficult this can be, but it would reduce risky vehicle and helicopter movements and the burden on our personnel and the GOP. Post's limited logistical resources are overwhelmed by the number of visiting delegations, their size, as well as the complexity and duration of their visits. Given that congressional visits have to be our highest priority, we are going

to cut down on executive branch visits to accommodate CODELS.

¶ 15. (SBU) After a lull following the death of Baitullah Mehsud, violence again is on the rise. Since the beginning of October, there have been five terrorist attacks in Islamabad and Rawalpindi and a total of 30 attacks nationwide killing 550 people - including almost 300 people in Peshawar alone.

¶ 16. (SBU) Because of security concerns, visitors cannot generally be accommodated in hotels, and on-compound housing for VIP visitors is extremely limited.

¶ 17. (SBU) In addition to the housing shortage, GOP reluctance to provide customs clearance for equipment (including armored vehicles) and visas to incoming U.S. staff is resulting in critical shortages of both supplies and personnel. Some embassy sections have now fallen to 50 percent manning, and we are denying leave or departure from post because there are no incoming replacements. We cannot accommodate large numbers of visitors with our greatly reduced staffing.

¶ 18. (SBU) Travel outside of Islamabad has become a particularly contentious issue. Visitors often tell us they are willing to assume the personal risk to travel to conflict zones, apparently unmindful of the enormous logistical tail and risk to embassy personnel which such visits entail. We will only support these visits infrequently, when the visit is clearly mission-critical. Helicopter support is limited - the INL Air Wing has also been affected by the inability to secure visas for its key personnel, particularly mechanics - and we are uncertain of the maintenance of Pakistani helicopters, which are being used constantly in combat in

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any case. Unlike Iraq and Afghanistan, there are no U.S. military helicopters or aircraft available in Pakistan to move visitors around.

¶ 19. (SBU) Helicopter trips outside of Islamabad require the prepositioning of armored vehicles (FAVs) upcountry where the vehicles, drivers, advance and RSO personnel must wait, becoming easily identifiable targets. The distances and time needed to move vehicles (a two-hour helicopter trip might require 18 hours on the ground) mean that multiple motorcades are required for the same visit, as resources sent elsewhere are unavailable to move the same delegation in the capital. Support for large and/or multiple VIP delegations often results in our own personnel being placed in "soft" vehicles for our high volume shuttle service, which increases their personal risk.

¶ 10. (SBU) The GOP is increasingly raising concerns about the number of high level (President, Prime Minister, Chief of Army Staff) appointments we have been requesting. It was not unusual during recent Congressional recesses to have four to five appointments with each of these officials in a week, and multiple appointments on a weekend. There have been instances when multiple CODELs had separate appointments the same day with the same official.

¶ 11. (SBU) Officials of the government point out privately to us that it would be difficult to have an official meeting in Washington on a Sunday, yet here we request Sunday meetings all the time. Our Pakistani counterparts tell us that protocol demands that they grant the appointments. We also request meetings with high level officials on the Islamic equivalents of Christmas and Easter. The message that this not-so-subtly conveys is that Pakistan is a third-rate, poor country dependent on the United States and "If we are giving them billions of dollars, they can surely meet with us on Sunday." The GOP understands the importance of Senators like Kerry, Inouye and Levin and will meet with them anytime; however, requests for meetings on weekends and Islamic holidays have become routine.

¶ 17. (SBU) In CY2009 to date, Post supported 89 VIP delegations totaling 646 personnel, who stayed 160 nights and used 894 FAV vehicle days. Already, Post has notification of ten VIP delegations planned for the first half of January 2010 including three major CODELS on the same day. (During a recent Congressional recess, we had nine senators in Islamabad in one day.) We recommend a system

be put in place so that official travelers must initially contact the desk with travel plans at least thirty days in advance. If we refuse country clearance or ask that the size of delegations be reduced, we request the Department support us in setting these limitations. We also recommend that delegations look into such technologies as video conferencing with Pakistani counterparts.

Patterson